

Message Text

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ACTION NEA-10

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FM AMEMBASSY MANAMA BAHRAIN

TO SECSTATE WASHINGTON DC 2355

INFO AMEMBASSY ABU DHABI UAE

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AMEMBASSY CAIRO EGYPT

AMCONSUL DHAHRAN SAUDI ARABIA

AMEMBASSY DOHA QATAR

AMEMBASSY JIDDA SAUDI ARABIA

AMEMBASSY KUWAIT KUWAIT

AMEMBASSY LONDON UK

AMEMBASSY MUSCAT OMAN

AMEMBASSY TEHRAN IRAN

COMIDEASTFOR

CINCUSNAVEUR LONDON UK

USCINCEUR VAIHINGEN GE

SECDEF WASHINGTON DC

CNO WASHINGTON DC

C O N F I D E N T I A L MANAMA 0917 SECTION ONE OF TWO

BEIRUT PLEASE POUCH BAGHDAD

E.O. 11652 : GDS

TAGS : PFOR, BA

SUBJ : BAHRAIN FOUR YEARS OLD: SAFE AND SOUND

BUT STRAINED AND SOBER

REF : MANAMA 507 (JULY 1974)

SUMMARY: BAHRAIN REMAINS POLITICALLY STABLE, ITS SOCIETY

BASICALLY WHOLE, BUT THE GOVERNMENT HAS FOUND THE PARLIAMENTARY

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GOING TOUGHER THAN ANTICIPATED, WHILE RAPID DEVELOPMENT HAS

INTENSIFIED ECONOMIC/SOCIAL STRAINS. GOB APPEARS DETERMINED TO PUSH ON WITH THE CONSTITUTIONAL EXPERIMENT AND TO MAINTAIN GOOD RELATIONS WITH ITS NEIGHBORS WHILE FITTING INTO ITS PROPER NICHE IN GULF PECKING ORDER. AFTER FOUR YEARS OF INDEPENDENCE, HOWEVER, BAHRAINI REGIME IS INCREASINGLY FORCED TO RECOGNIZE LIMITATIONS ON ITS ASPIRATIONS AND FREEDOM OF ACTION. IT WANTS TO MAINTAIN CLOSE OFFICIAL AND BUSINESS TIES WITH THE U.S. AND EUROPE BUT FEELS SOMEWHAT FORCED TO MUTE THIS WESTERN CONNECTION, NOTABLY BY ABANDONING ITS OBJECTIVE OF MAINTAINING U.S. NAVY PRESENCE PERMANENTLY. END SUMMARY

1. THE NEW WISDOM. ON THE FOURTH ANNIVERSARY OF FULL INDEPENDENCE, BAHRAIN IS POLITICALLY STABLE AND MORE PROSPEROUS THAN BAHRAINIS IMAGINED POSSIBLE A FEW YEARS BACK. BUT THE LAST YEAR HAS BEEN A SOBERING AND MATURING EXPERIENCE FOR THE REGIME AND ITS GOVERNMENT. THE PRICES TO BE PAID FOR ECONOMIC GROWTH, FOR CONTINUED GOOD RELATIONS WITH WEALTHIER NEIGHBORS, AND FOR ORDERLY DEVELOPMENT OF CONSTITUTIONAL REPRESENTATIVE GOVERNMENT ARE NOW MORE APPARENT, AND HIGHER THAN THE GOB HAD THOUGHT. NOW THE GOVERNMENT HAS A CLEARER SENSE OF THE POLITICAL LIMITATIONS ON ITS INFLUENCE AND ROOM FOR MANEUVER AT HOME AND ABROAD. IT IS LIGHTENING SHIP FOR A POTENTIALLY STORMY THIRD PARLIAMENTARY SESSION, POSSIBLY PRECEDED BY DISSOLUTION OF ASSEMBLY AND HOLDING OF NEW ELECTIONS; FIRST OVERBOARD WAS ITS POLICY OF SEEKING TO MAINTAIN THE POLITICALLY CONTROVERSIAL U.S. NAVY PRESENCE INDEFINITELY. BAHRAIN STILL SEEKS A CLOSER OFFICIAL AND PRIVATE BUSINESS RELATIONSHIP WITH THE U.S. AND WESTERN EUROPE, BUT THERE IS FELT NEED TO MUTE THE MORE CONTROVERSIAL ASPECTS OF THE WESTERN CONNECTION IN DEFERENCE TO NATIONALIST SENTIMENT AT HOME AND THE STIRRINGS OF REGIONAL COOPERATION IN THE GULF.

2. THE GRAND OFFENSIVE. LAST OCTOBER THE GOVERNMENT SALLIED FORTH INTO PARLIAMENTARY FRAY, APPARENTLY SERENELY CONFIDENT IT COULD KEEP THE RADICAL LEFTIST PEOPLES' BLOC OFF-BALANCE AND ISOLATED, DEVELOP THE MODERATE CENTERISTS INTO AN EFFECTIVE "LOYALIST BLOC" AND LEAVE THE CONSERVATIVE SHIA "ISLAMIC BLOC" NO CHOICE BUT GRUDGING ACQUIESCENCE IN GOVERNMENT POLICIES DESIGNED TO FURTHER ORDERLY PROGRESS (MANAMA 801). THE PRIME MINISTER EVEN TALKED PRIVATELY ABOUT HOPING TO BRING SOME OF

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THE LEFTISTS INTO THE CENTERIST FOLD. IN PURSUIT OF THIS OBJECTIVE, THE GOVERNMENT EARLY ON MADE A DEAL, DEVELOPMENT MINISTER SHIRAWI TELLS US, WITH THE MODERATES. THEY WOULD KEEP THE CONTROVERSIAL ISSUES, NOTABLY THE SECURITY DECREE, BLOCKED IN COMMITTEE WHILE LETTING THE "MAGIC" OF THE GOVERNMENT'S PROGRESSIVE SOCIAL/ECONOMIC POLICIES WORK ON PUBLIC OPINION. FOR MOST OF THE PARLIAMENTARY YEAR THE STRATEGY SEEMED TO BE WORKING. THE GOVERNMENT PUSHED THROUGH A BUNCH OF ESSENTIALLY

ADMINISTRATIVE LEGISLATION WITHOUT LOSING A VOTE, THEN GOT ITS BUDGET AND THE OIL PARTICIPATION AGREEMENT APPROVED. FAST ON ITS PARLIAMENTARY FEET, THE GOVERNMENT SEEMED TO WIN ON POINTS WHENEVER THE LEFT OR RIGHT RAISED CONTROVERSIAL ISSUES.

3. THE WHIG BETRAYAL. BUT THE RADICAL LEFT WAS CLEARLY REGAINING ITS BALANCE AND THE ISLAMIC BLOC WAS BECOMING CANTANKEROUS, AND "POPULIST" ON ECONOMIC ISSUES. EROSION IN THE GOVERNMENT'S POSITION BECAME APPARENT DURING A FULL DRESS DEBATE ON ECONOMIC POLICY; THE GOVERNMENT'S EFFORT TO EASE THE ECONOMIC PRESSURES ON THE PUBLIC HAD NOT BEEN SO "MAGICAL" AFTER ALL AND THE PEOPLE'S DEPUTIES HAD MANY A HARSH WORD FOR THE RULER'S MINISTERS. WORST OF ALL, THE "LOYALIST BLOC" NEVER MATERIALIZED. THE MODERATE DEPUTIES (HALF THE TOTAL ELECTED MEMBERSHIP OF THE ASSEMBLY), WHILE UNABLE TO GET THEMSELVES TOGETHER AS AN EFFECTIVE PARLIAMENTARY BLOC, CLEARLY WERE "WHIG" RATHER THAN "TORY". IF THE GOVERNMENT WANTED THEIR SUPPORT, IT HAD TO WIN IT DEPUTY BY DEPUTY ON EACH ISSUE.

4. THE NAVY DEBATE. ONE ISSUE ON WHICH THE GOVERNMENT FOUND VIRTUALLY NO MODERATE (OR ANY OTHER) SUPPORT IN THE ASSEMBLY WAS THAT OF CONTINUED U.S. NAVY PRESENCE IN BAHRAIN, DEBATED IN CLOSED SESSION IN JANUARY (MANAMA 107). THE REALIZATION THAT MIDDLE EAST FORCE HAD FEW STAUNCH SUPPORTERS OUTSIDE THE AL KHALIFA PALACES, AND THE TABLING BY THE PEOPLE'S BLOC OF A "SENSE OF PARLIAMENT" RESOLUTION CALLING FOR THE NAVY'S OUSTER, LED THE GOVERNMENT TO CONCLUDE IT MUST SOMEHOW "DEPOLITICIZE" THIS ISSUE SHOULD THE PARLIAMENTARY GOING GET ROUGH (MANAMA 528).

5. THE CONSTITUTIONAL CRISIS. AT THE END OF THE PARLIAMENTARY SEASON, THE GOING GOT ROUGH INDEED WHEN, TO THE GOVERNMENT'S SUPRISE AND DISMAY, THE SECURITY DECREE ISSUE POPPED OUT OF COMMITTEE WITH AN UNFAVORABLE REPORT. IN THREE WEEKS OF CONFIDENTIAL

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LOBBYING, WHILE IT BOYCOTTED THE ASSEMBLY, THE GOVERNMENT FOUND ITSELF UNABLE TO MUSTER EVEN THE FEW VOTES NEEDED FROM ISLAMIC BLOC AND MODERATE DEPUTIES TO PUSH THROUGH THE SECURITY LAW (MANAMA 764 AND PREVIOUS). THUS, THE PARLIAMENTARY SEASON

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